
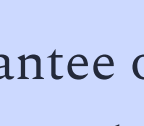
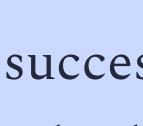



A dash of confirmation, and a pinch of hope

Never assume?

 Jessica Rose
7 hr ago

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I had to pay a visit to a government building recently. You all know these visits: long lines, angry people, bureaucracy, stress - all with no guarantee of success. I had walked to the building and once finally there, I proceeded inside. I climbed some steps and found myself in the inner chamber of a waiting area where myself and hordes of other people were instructed to wait. I thought to myself (at first) that "This isn't normal". And then I heard myself say it out loud: "This isn't normal."

I think maybe a more appropriate word to use in this case is 'right', but the word 'normal' came into my head, and out of my mouth. The kids waiting with their parents in front of me and beside me looked at me when I uttered these words, and they did not look away from me quickly. Maybe they liked my red glasses.

I have never been a fan of non-spontaneous herding; of people, or of animals. Non-spontaneous herding, in this article's context, refers to the accumulation of beings *by the design of some other being*: like humans herding cows so that they can be destroyed to render their fat for use as 'biofuels'. (So very green.) Or like herding of people to ensure that a biotech company can buy their plasma so these people can eat.¹ This is as opposed to spontaneous herding, like when starlings do that amazing sync thing.

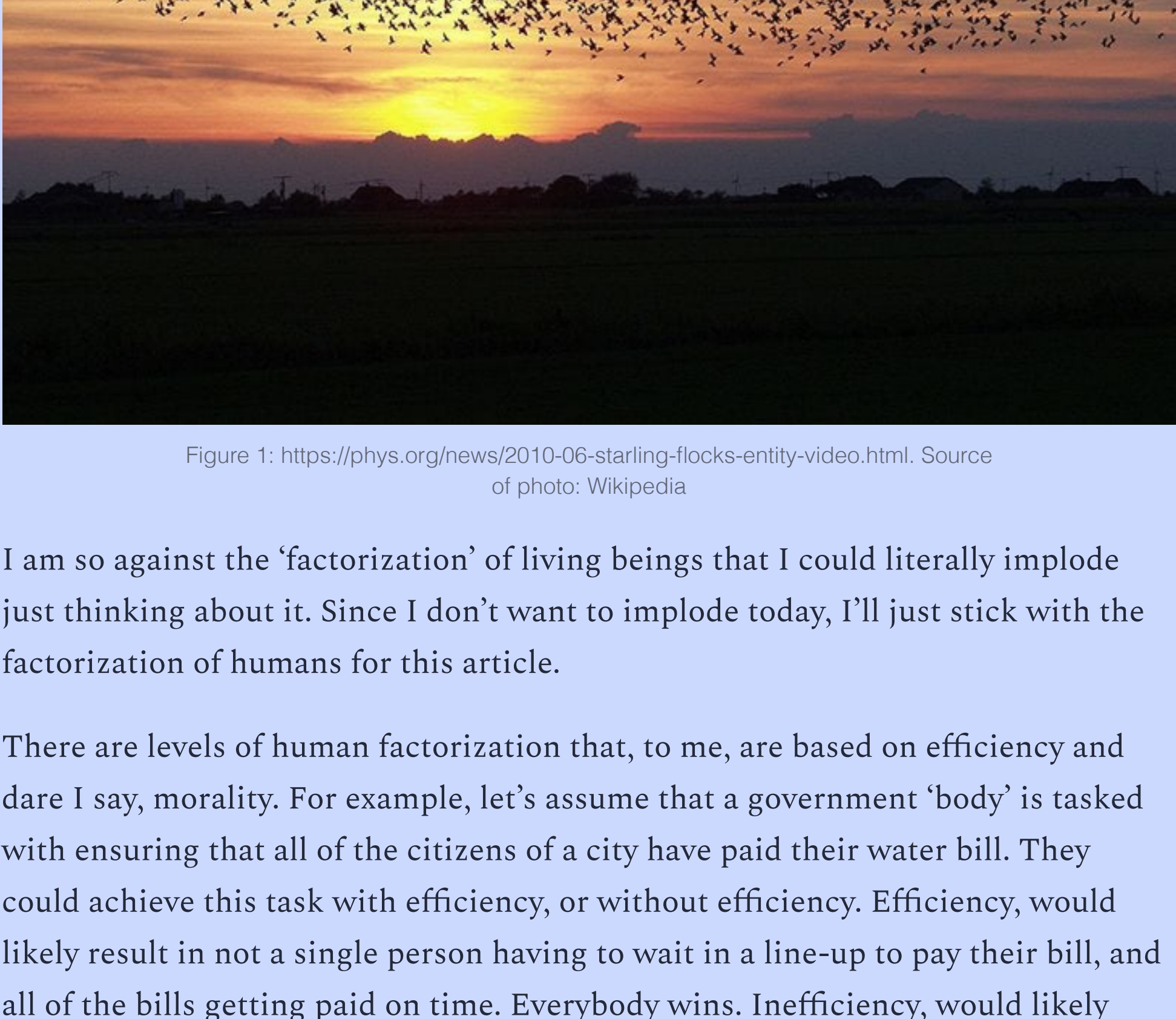


Figure 1: <https://phys.org/news/2010-06-starling-flocks-entity-video.html>. Source of photo: Wikipedia

I am so against the 'factorization' of living beings that I could literally implode just thinking about it. Since I don't want to implode today, I'll just stick with the factorization of humans for this article.

There are levels of human factorization that, to me, are based on efficiency and dare I say, morality. For example, let's assume that a government 'body' is tasked with ensuring that all of the citizens of a city have paid their water bill. They could achieve this task with efficiency, or without efficiency. Efficiency, would likely result in not a single person having to wait in a line-up to pay their bill, and all of the bills getting paid on time. Everybody wins. Inefficiency, would likely result in every single person waiting for hours in multiple line-ups to pay their bill and not all bills getting paid on time, and a lot of angry and frustrated people. Nobody wins.² The former is something of a mythical beast, at least from my experiences, so allow me to focus on the latter.

Inefficiency. It seems to be at the root of line-ups and government 'body' controlled systems. These line-ups and herding are also demoralizing to all involved, if you ask me. It makes us all feel, unimportant. Doesn't it? Which is so very contrary to the truth.

Let's get back to my story.

Upon arrival at the required floor and outer waiting room where I had to go, I was met with: an empty outer waiting room! 'How lucky am I today!', I thought. 'No people in line! This will be a breeze.' As I proceeded through the outer waiting room I saw two things: 1. the security man, and 2. the machine that doles out 'numbers' that assign the customer their place in line. The machine had a hand-written note on it. I don't know what it said but usually that means that the machine is 'out of order'.

The security guard was large (tall) and security-guardish: assertive, professionally stand-offish. You know. I will refer to this person from now on as *Guarda*. I told Guarda that I didn't have an appointment since I was told that I didn't need one for my required need. Guarda retrieved a ticket from the machine (which evidently, was not broken), and instructed me to proceed to the inner waiting room where the 'servers' were located in their work cubicles. Well, it didn't take me long to find out where all the people were. Man, oh man. The large inner waiting room was completely full. Many entire families. There was barely anywhere to sit. I was sweating balls since I had walked quite far to get to the building (and done the stairs), so I preferred to stand anyway. The only place to stand was next to Guarda, on the side of the entryway to the inner waiting room. So I did. And this is where the loveliness starts. I am not being sarcastic.

I had asked Guarda if I could wait in the outer waiting room and he said no. I muttered under my breath: 'Now I don't even get to decide *where* I wait?' I suppressed my further mutterings, however, and chose to stand next to Guarda. It was really the only place to stand where I had a bit of space on either side of me. Guarda then told me that I should sit down. I replied that since my ass was sweaty (and yes, I said this), I preferred to stand. I like seeing how people react to the inner true me, sometimes. He laughed. Then Guarda said that it's better if I don't stand next to him. I replied: 'Oh, is it bothering you that I am standing here?', to which Guarda seemed to pause and ponder his actual feelings about what I had asked, and replied: 'No, not all'. I would have moved if he had said yes.

It was at this point in our exchange that I actually saw Guarda remember that there was a line between designated efficiency that comes from following instructions, and the efficiency that arises naturally (that seems to be driven by morality), by just doing a great job and being, well, human. Let me clarify.

We both relaxed once that moment came upon both of us. It was something quite monumental for me. I am not sure what he felt, but I know that this man affected me today. I believe that I did affect him too though, and it was because *I was willing, and able, to change my own stupid and aggressive knee-jerk muttery reaction to these kinds of situations* (where I have to participate in the herding) *to something pleasant*. This change was enabled in me simply because *he* was there. I am not saying that this had nothing to with me being ready to experience a change, but if the regular security guard guy had been there, this experience would *never* have occurred.

We continued to talk with a bit of small talk to further ease our own tensions: his because of his job and mine because I hate being herded. His job is incredibly difficult because every single person that enters that building is stressed, even before they arrive. Many are 'ready' to fight. His job is to orient people and to make sure everyone gets their turn as efficiently as possible. But, it also means he has to be a bit of a psychologist, a therapist, a linguist and more. Is that a part of their training? He has to cope with every individual's personal story, and in many cases their neuroses as well. I don't think this is a part of their training.

As our conversation went on, he began to speak to me more freely, as did I, and I gained insight into yet another level of difficulty that he was forced to process as 'part of his job'.

Two girls came to the door that separated the inner and outer waiting rooms where me and Guarda were respectively standing and sitting. He excused himself from our conversation and greeted the girls. They were quite giggly and he routed them to where they needed to go. He came back and sat down and told me that the girls were looking to get a marriage license. He said he thought it was for them, as in the two girls, but it turned out that the girls were friends and that the license was for one of the girls marrying a guy. Then he told me that he has to be very careful what he says in reference to people's gender. My mouth dropped. I asked him what he meant by that. I mean seriously, what? I just listened, because clearly, this polite man needed to talk, or at least wanted to. His job requires him to be militant and 'professional' so I can really imagine that having a person to talk to would be nice. I certainly would appreciate it. He told me that he had to take a new training course to get the job he was doing. Ok. That sounds pretty normal to me. Every year, you have to pass a test to keep working with chemicals and biologicals in labs. I get it. Staying up-to-date and relevant is important.

But then he started telling me that he was nervous about the 'judgement' he had made (only in his mind) about the two girls. He had thought that the marriage was between them. I told him, 'I get that. Why not?' They were adorable and giggly and asking about a marriage license. I told him that I thought it was a fine assumption to make but also, that when we assume, sometimes we make an 'ass' out of 'u' and 'me'. Thanks Benny Hill. He laughed. Then he said the reason he was nervous was because as part of his training - as in, he had to do a frikkin' course - he was instructed to be very careful not to 'assign' gender, or assume anything related to gender-related anything, to anyone whilst managing them at the door for appointments. He also said it is absolutely forbidden to touch someone. I just looked at him. Was he really saying this to me? Was this man conveying to me, that having been trained *not* to refer to a woman as *ma'am*, and having been trained that it was *forbidden* to guide an elderly person to their seat with a soft hand, made him feel: icky? Did my ears deceive me? Is this a new thing? I told him that I found it extremely odd that this comprised a part of his training as a security agent. I asked him: 'Why?' Was it because of the 'risk of offending someone?' He even finished my sentence on this point. This was the reason that they gave to teach this to their trainees as part of the course curriculum as a security agent. I believe he thought this was as 'inefficient' as I do. The professional-respectful-kind-courteous package and the not-offending-people package, kind of end up in the same neighborhood. Don't they? Isn't it up to the people involved in the exchange what is appropriate? It seems big brother might not believe that we can make our own mutually-beneficial decisions.

We talked for about 20 additional minutes I suppose, about people and family values, and I learned that he was married to his first love that he met on an online dating site called Jdate. I even learned that she was an Aries. I was so surprised when he automatically started talking about horoscopes - like somehow he knew that I really dig that stuff. He told me that they didn't meet immediately and that they met face-to-face only after writing to each other online. They didn't even have photos of each other. I loved this part of his story. I looked at him and said how wonderful it was that both of them got to imagine the other simply by the other's words. He said that when he first saw her, she looked exactly as he had imagined, and that it was love at first sight. For her as well. I just love this kind of story since I am a hardcore OLD-SCHOOL romantic but to hear it there, from this man, in this context was... SURREAL.

He told me that they got married shortly thereafter and never looked back. We talked about how things have changed so much since the good old days. We talked about how people seem to care very little for each other nowadays and that this is sad. We agreed that this was particularly evident in people's actions when they are late. I am stringent on this point. People who are late are literally sitting on others, in my opinion. Our time, our energy is everything. Don't dismiss my everything. You will end up pissing everyone off and ruining a potential for non-turbulent flow. He agreed. And the not-being-on-time thing was particularly annoying for him because it threw his efficient list into chaos. He held his list - which comprised the scheduled appointments - in his hand the whole time. He pointed out that some people just blow off their appointments and don't even call to cancel. The problem then became that the 'servers' would wait for these no-shows - without serving the next person in line! Don't even ask me how they justify that. But he also saw the insanity of this system and it really frustrated him. This scores him with even more points as a true professional who cares about his job, in my opinion.

Eventually, I sat down, once I had cooled off and we all passed the next 2 hours passively, and actively, waiting. I had to sit on a bench that wasn't near enough to the door in order for us to keep talking. So, I watched as people came and went. Guarda was kind in his approach to all who entered the room. I watched everyone. I played with my tablet. I stretched.

Finally it was my turn. I had waited about 2.5 hours, and it took literally 15 seconds for the server to do what I needed her to do.

On the way out of the inner waiting room, Guarda greeted me near the door and said, 'That was fast!' and I said, 'Yes indeed.' I held out my hand to him to shake and I looked at him and said, 'My name is Jessica and it was a pleasure talking to you today. You're doing a great job.' He shook my hand, and was courteous and professional to the end. He didn't disclose his name (part of the job) and asked me to have a nice day. He said it with warmth and a bit of sadness in his eyes. Maybe he was sad I was going. I had a nice day.

This experience really shifted me. I mean that.

I associate any kind of herding with very negative emotions and feelings. But Guarda elevated me that day - just because of who he was - to a place where I can go back to in my memory (or mind), that is filled with sharing and laughter. The next time I have to face the herding, I will think of this particular experience and feel relaxed and perhaps even smile through it. Memory over-writing. Ain't it great?

The individual - the human being. Each one of us matters more than we know because, in fact, we don't know what effect we have on others by just being us. Guarda has no idea he affected me this way, let alone that he made it to my Substack. But this is the beauty of it all. There's no incentivization at play here. It happens simply because, it happens.

This is also why it is vital not to live in fear mode - it masks who you are.

Be who you are. Aim for non-turbulent flow and remember that patience is a virtue and kindness breeds kindness.

Thank you Guarda. I send you forever warmth and prosperity in all things.

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abh-0hxGi94>

2 The former would likely require the ratio of [employees processing the bill payments] to [people paying] to be close to 1:1, and would also likely incorporate a staggered schedule (staggering restaurant reservations is a very effective means of satisfying *all* customers, and keeping *all* employees happy), as an example.

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
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